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**Barriers to reciprocal university‐community partnerships for service‐learning: Insights from an Egyptian context**

Neivin Shalabi, PhD candidate, University of Denver [neivinshalabi@gmail.com]

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**Summary**

This paper addresses reciprocity between the academy and the community in service‐learning partnerships. Utilizing Enos and Morton’s (2003) theory for transactional-transformative university-community partnerships, this session reports on qualitative findings from research that explored the barriers to building reciprocal service‐learning partnerships between a university in Egypt and NGOs.

Reciprocity between the university and the community has been repeatedly emphasized as a core ideal of service‐learning partnerships in higher education (Battistoni, 2006). Despite this emphasis, research suggests that this ideal is seldom honored in practice (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). Related to this is Enos and Morton’s (2003) theory that transactional relationships operate within existing structures whereby partners connect together because each has something that the other perceives as useful. Such relationships can lead to the development of new identities for partners.

A naturalistic approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was utilized to collect data from students, faculty, staff, and community partners of a private university in Egypt. Data analysis revealed three major barriers to building reciprocal university‐community partnerships for service‐learning. Egypt classism and strong social class differences constituted a major obstacle in building and maintaining reciprocal relationships between the partners. Interestingly, the study revealed that not only do students and faculty perceive of themselves as superior to the people they encounter at service sites, but that community partners also perpetuate these conceptions by assuming that university partners are more knowledgeable than themselves. Thus, they tend to rely on academics for solving community‐related problems.

This study’s findings are significant in that the outcomes provide empirical evidence for and increased confidence in the theoretical arguments that these factors are impediments to establishing democratic university‐community partnerships (Saltmarsh et al., 2009). Additionally, the findings pertaining to classism brought attention to how the local culture influences service‐learning partnerships. In so doing, these findings can stimulate future studies to deepen our understanding of how the local context may promote or paralyze reciprocity between the university and the community. Ultimately, the study’s outcomes call upon university constituents to find strategies to empower community partners to recognize the assets they bring to partnerships.

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